

## **An Analysis of the Adoptions Unit in Facilitating Permanency for Children**

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The purpose of our quantitative study was to determine if significant factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity, behavioral/mental health issues, physical health, and/or developmental delays present barriers to successful adoption for all foster/adoptive children. A one-shot chart review using a pre-experimental design was used by gathering data from the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) report of all children available for adoption in May 2004. One hundred children were randomly selected from the SNAP report in which each child's age, gender, ethnicity, and any barriers to adoption (i.e. – ADHD) were gathered and reported on the chart review form. This information was then compared to the statistics within the state of Kentucky for all children available for adoption using the AFCARS database. The major findings from this particular study found that white children represented 69% and 65% of children available for adoption within the Special Needs Adoption Program and Kentucky respectively. In addition, the mean age of children available for adoption within SNAP was 12.53 years, with twelve-year-olds representing 13% of the sample population, only second to fifteen-year-olds, which represented 23% of the sample population. This information suggests that recruitment efforts for children available for adoption in Jefferson County and Kentucky should reflect the needs of the child indicated above.

A qualitative study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of SNAP in facilitating permanency for all foster/adoptive children. Fifteen adoption workers were purposively selected from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Adoptions Unit. Participants were invited by letter to participate in the study. A narrative approach, using a focus group design was used to gather information about the adoptions unit in ensuring adoption for all children. Five adoption workers participated in the study. The session was audio recorded and notes were taken to ensure validity. Open and axial coding were used to gather specific themes and quotes from the responses of the participants. There appeared to be an overall theme that age is a barrier to adoption, as indicated by the themes and quotes that emerged from the focus group. Other responses given by the participants related to the need for additional supportive services for the adoptive family after a child has been adopted, recruitment for adoptive homes for adolescents, more relative placements for children in foster care and increased independent living skills for adolescents.

These studies have implications for policy and practice within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to ensure all children achieve permanency through adoption. Specialized recruitment for adolescents may be essential for permanency, as this age group represented a large percentage of the sample population. Likewise, all children ages 12-18 need individualized services that teach skills in self-sufficiency, as many adolescents “age out” of foster care with no identified adoptive placement. Increasing staff to accommodate more adolescents who are in foster care would assist in providing additional services to promote appropriate permanent placements. Lastly, adoption workers should be involved in recruitment within the child's community, church, etc, to enhance recruitment efforts for the child.

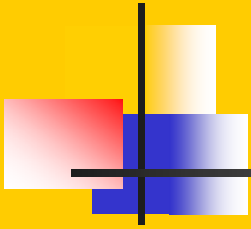


# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ADOPTIONS UNIT IN FACILITATING PERMANENCY

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# Introduction

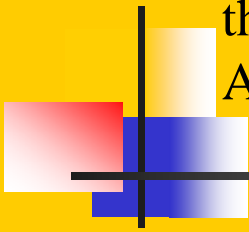


## Purpose of Study:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the Adoptions Unit within Cabinet for Health and Family Services in facilitating adoption for all children.
- To provide a better understanding about what significant factors influence timely adoption for all children

## Research Questions:

- What are the differences among children awaiting adoption through the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP), compared to those children awaiting adoption in the state of Kentucky (AFCARS)?
- How effective is SNAP in facilitating permanency for all foster/adoptive children?



# What are the Differences Among Children Awaiting Adoption Through the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP), Compared to Those Awaiting Adoption in the State of Kentucky (AFCARS)?

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## Design

- A pre-experimental design using a static group comparison model
- One-shot chart review was used to gather information from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) report
- The May 2004 SNAP report was used for this study
- The comparison group are children within the state of Kentucky who are still awaiting adoption
- These two groups were compared in terms of gender and ethnicity
- The unit of analysis was children available for adoption during the 2003-2004 fiscal year

## Sample

- Probabilistic and systematic random sampling strategy
- Sampling frame for this study was all children committed to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and whose parental rights have been terminated
- Every 2nd subject was selected from the SNAP report

# VARIABLES

Independent Variable= Significant Factors (See Table I)

Dependent Variable= Adoption

**Table I:**

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>
Age	Ordinal (recoded)	Date of Birth
Gender	Nominal	Male/Female
Ethnicity	Nominal	White, Black, or Biracial
ADD, ADHD, ODD, & Poor Impulse Control	Nominal	Any DSM IV Diagnosis
Asthma, Diabetes, Epilepsy, & Quadriplegia	Nominal	Any medical diagnosis or ongoing medical problem
Autism, Developmental Delay, Learning Disability & Speech Delay	Nominal	Any diagnosed mental retardation, developmental or speech delay



# DATA COLLECTION

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## The SNAP report:

- Generated monthly when a child has no identified adoptive placement
- Chart reviews of existing data were used (no human subjects were used)
- The significant factors were listed on the report
- Data received was from May 2004
- Obtained verbal consent from the adoptions supervisor to retrieve the SNAP report

## AFCARS:

- Adoption and **F**oster **C**are **A**nalysis and **R**eporting **S**ystem collects case level information on all children in foster care and awaiting adoption in the United States
- Data collected from October 1, 2001 to September 30, 2002 for the state of Kentucky
- Retrieved AFCARS data from the internet ([www.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.acf.hhs.gov))

# What are the differences among children awaiting adoption through SNAP, compared to those awaiting adoption in Kentucky?

## ETHNICITY

SNAP Data (N=100):

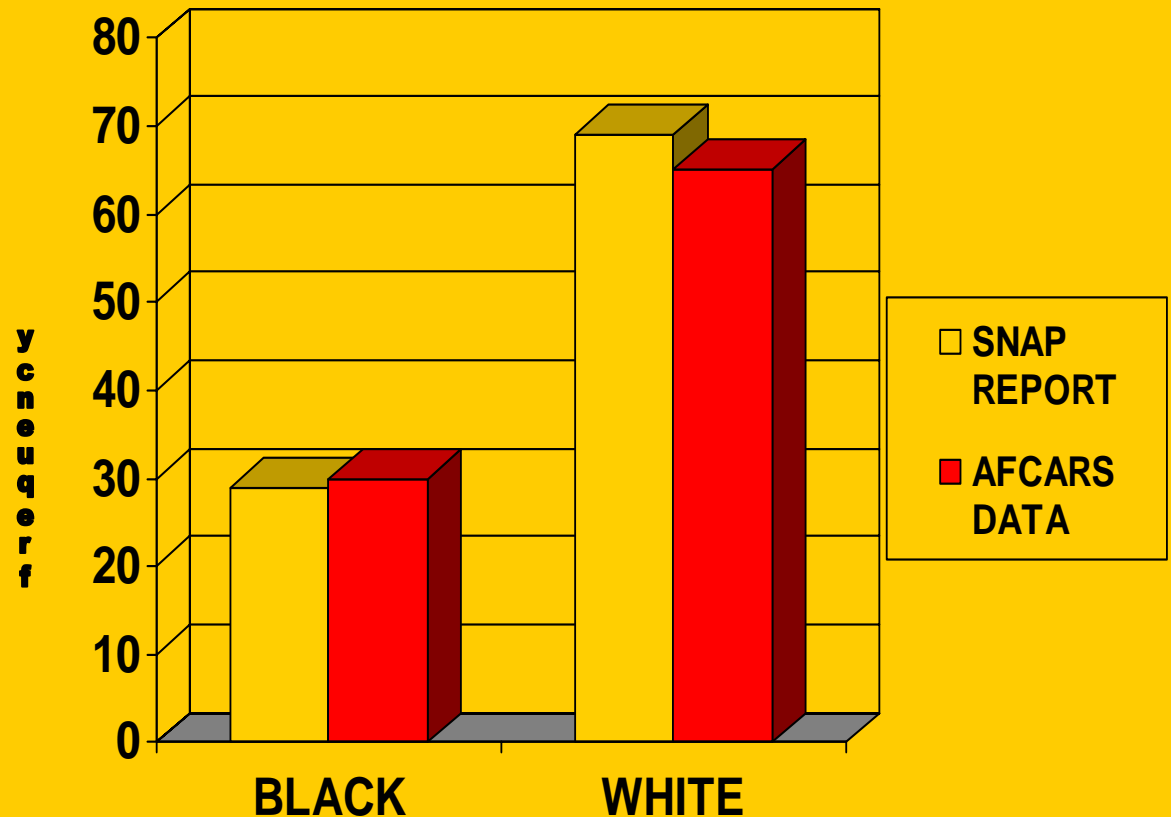
69%-White

29%-Black

AFCARS Data (N=559):

65%-White

30%-Black

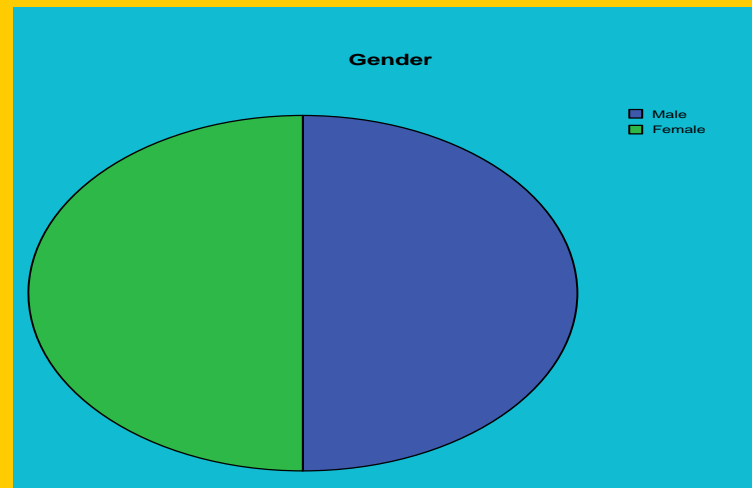


# What are the differences among children awaiting adoption through SNAP, compared to those awaiting adoption in Kentucky?

SNAP Data (N=100):

50% - Male

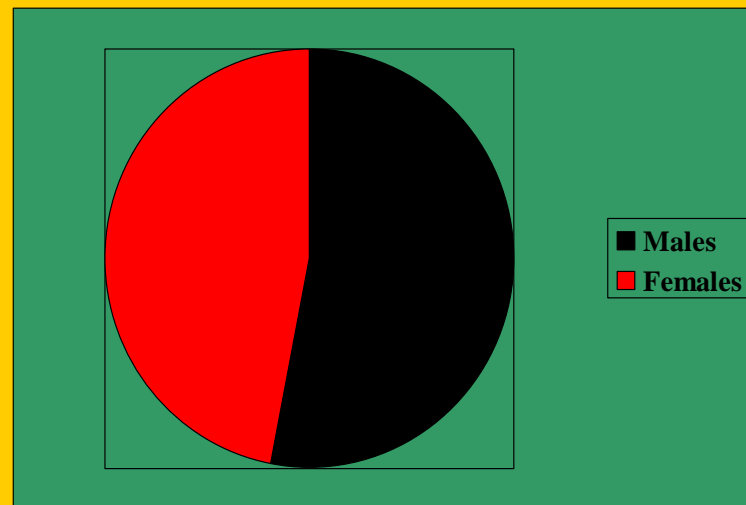
50% - Female



AFCARS Data (N=559):

53% - Male

47% - Female

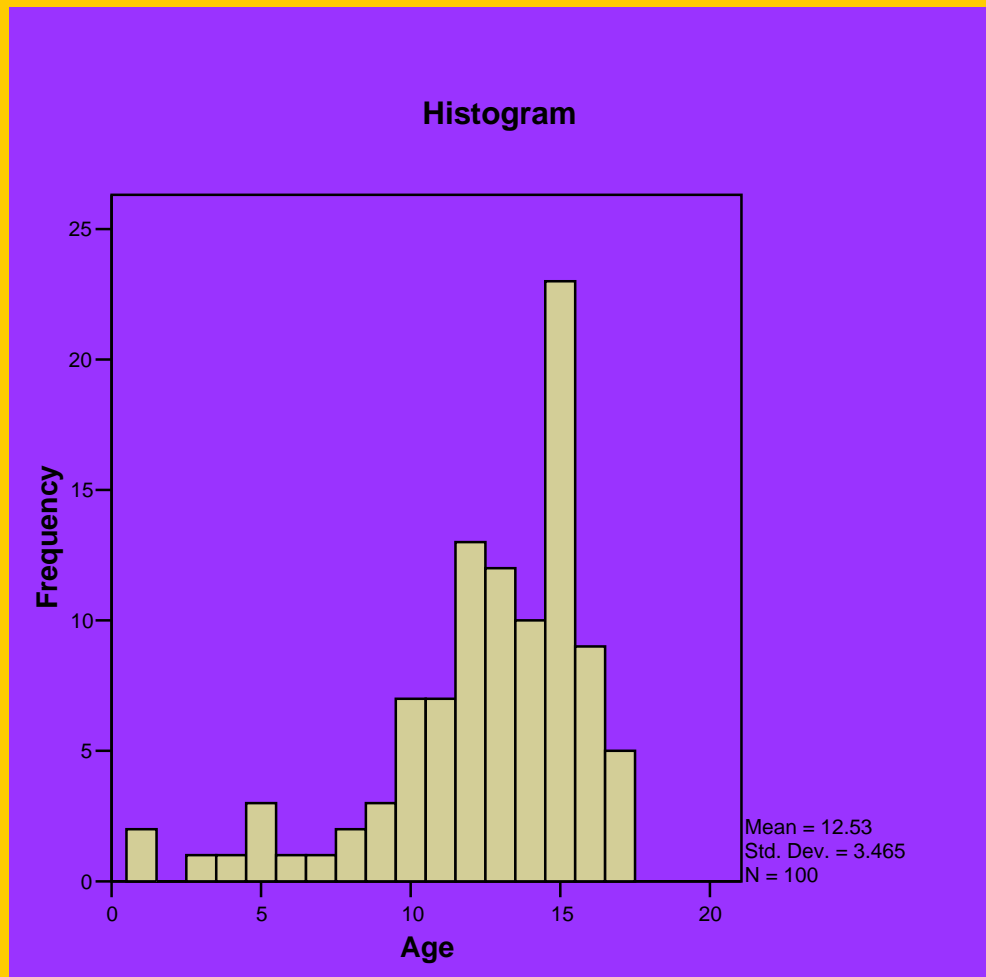




# What are the Differences Among Children Awaiting Adoption Through SNAP, Compared to Those Awaiting Adoption in Kentucky?

## Age (N=100)

- Mean age of child was 12.53 yrs; SD=3.465
- Median was 13.00
- Negative distribution; skewed to left, meaning there were fewer children in sample under 10 years
- This suggests a trend in the age of the children between 12-17 years



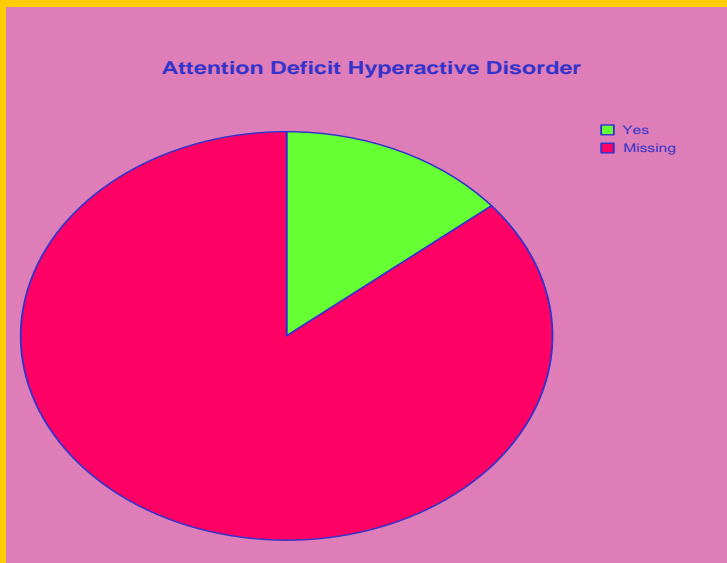
# What are the Differences Among Children Awaiting Adoption Through SNAP, Compared to Those Awaiting Adoption in Kentucky?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

N=100

Yes=14%

No=86%

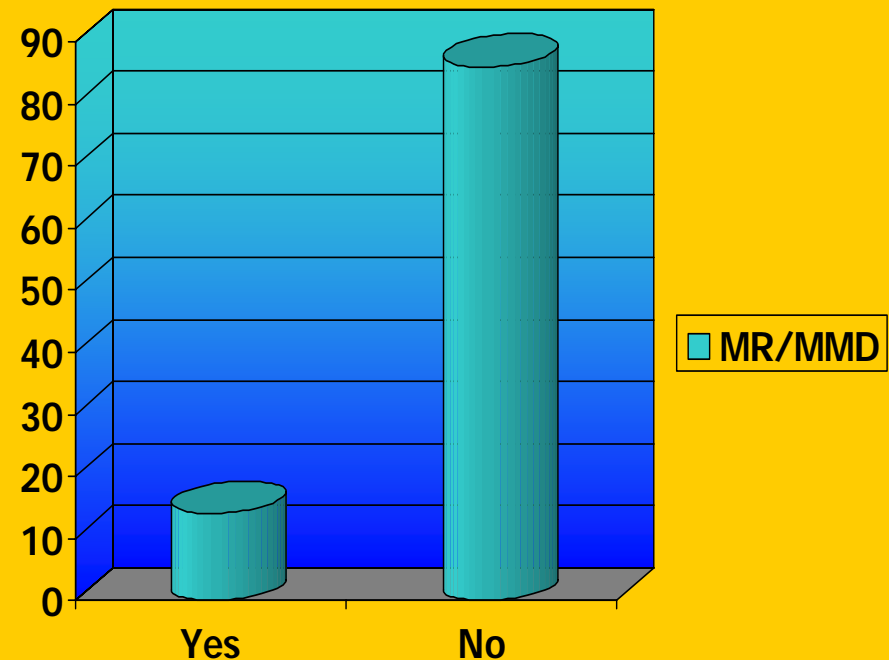


Mental Retardation/Mildly Mentally Disabled (MR/MMD)

N=100

Yes=14%

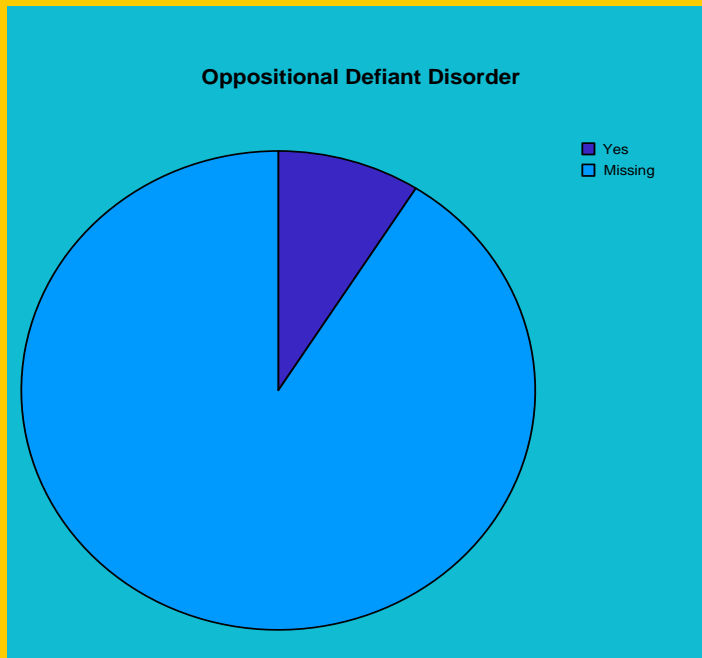
No=86%



# What are the Differences Among Children Awaiting Adoption Through SNAP, Compared to Those Awaiting Adoption in Kentucky?

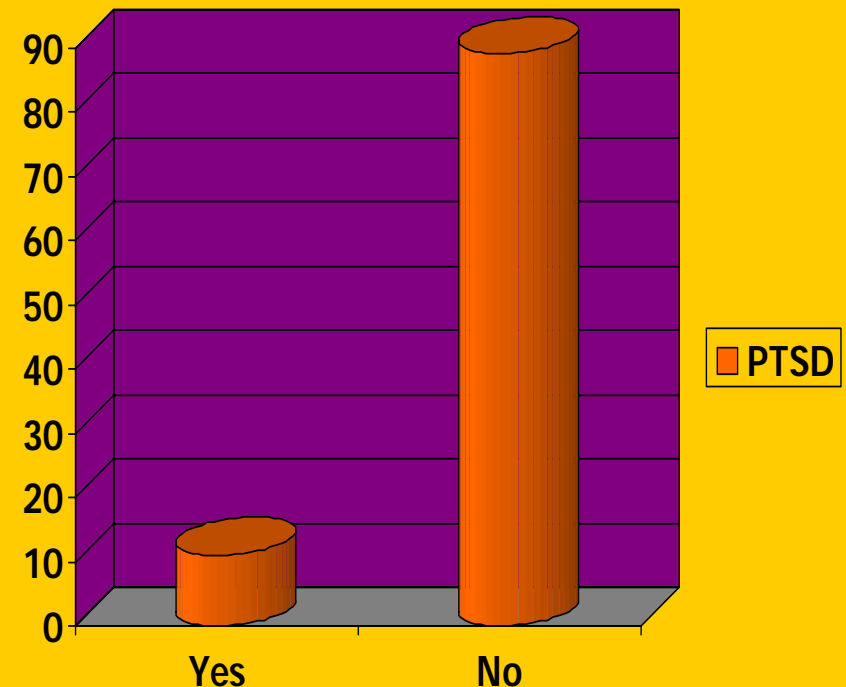
## Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

N=100  
Yes=9%  
No=91%



## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

N=100  
Yes=9%  
No=91%





# Statistical Tests

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- A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the relationship between the respondent's age and gender. No significant relationship was found ( $\chi = 1.529$ ,  $df(3)$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that the respondent's age does not appear to be related to the respondent's gender.
- A chi-square test of independence was also calculated comparing the relationship between the respondent's age and ethnicity. No significant relationship was found ( $\chi = 11.976$ ,  $df(6)$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that the respondent's age doesn't appear to be related to the respondent's ethnicity.
- A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the relationship between a respondent's gender and the length of time of children awaiting adoption (timeframe). No significant relationship was found ( $\chi = 1.004$ ,  $df(1)$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that the respondent's gender has no significant relationship with the amount of time the respondent has been waiting for adoption.
- A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the relationship between a respondent's ethnicity and timeframe. No significant relationship was found ( $\chi = .386$ ,  $df(2)$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that there doesn't appear to be a relationship between the respondent's ethnicity and the length of time awaiting adoption.



## Statistical Tests cont'd

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- A one way ANOVA was computed to compare the differences of ages between the ethnicities. No significant difference was found between the ages ( $F = 2.754$ ,  $p > \text{than } .05$ ). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the nature of the differences between the categories. This analysis showed that black respondents scored the highest ( $m = 3.34$ ,  $sd = .814$ ), followed by white respondents ( $m = 2.90$ ,  $sd = .926$ ), and lastly biracial respondents ( $m = 2.50$ ,  $sd = 2.121$ ). This information suggests that there was no significant difference in ages between the ethnicities.

# DISCUSSION

- No medical issues or developmental delays were found within our study
- A risk score is a way to determine if any of the respondents within our sample possessed one or more of the following significant factors: ADHD, MR/MMD, ODD or PTSD
- An outlier was discovered from the risk score computed and yielded the following results:

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: Black

Age: 12

Time Frame: Awaiting adoption 5 years

# of Significant Factors: 3





# How Effective is SNAP in Facilitating Permanency for all Foster/Adoptive Children?

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## DESIGN

- Narrative approach using focus group design
- Focus group took place at the Cabinet for Health and Family Services
- Focus group was tape recorded to ensure validity
- Note taking was also used to ensure validity
- Open and axial coding used to gather specific themes and quotes

## SAMPLE

- Fifteen adoptions workers were purposively selected from adoptions unit
- Participants were invited by letter to participate
- Five adoption workers agreed and participated in the focus group



## *How Effective is SNAP in Facilitating Permanency for all Foster/Adoptive Children?*

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### Focus Group Questions:

- What obstacles/barriers, if any, have you experienced as you were facilitating adoptions for children on your caseload?
- How did you address these obstacles/barriers?
- What changes, if any, would you make with the adoptions unit in order to assist in finding adoptive homes for all children?
- What is needed to ensure all foster children achieve permanency in a timely manner?
- What supports or services have you offered to families after their adoption was finalized to ensure stability of the child's placement?



# *How Effective is SNAP in Facilitating Permanency for all Foster/Adoptive Children?*

Sample Population- 5 Adoption Workers

## Themes/Quotes:

- “Ages fourteen and up do not want to be adopted.”
- “Children who are age 17 or higher do not want to be adopted.”
- “Not releasing children out of care so quickly at age 18.”
- “Allowing children to remain in out of home care until they age out of the system is not good.”
- “Age 17...too late? They do not want to be adopted.”
- “Kids in the system for years develop reactive attachment disorder, educational issues, etc.”
- “Maladaptive behaviors causes disruption”





# Discussion of Qualitative Study

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- There appeared to be an overall theme that age is a barrier to adoption.
- Need for supportive services for the adoptive family after a child has been adopted.
- Recruitment for more adoptive homes for adolescents.
- Increased independent living skills for adolescents
- Seeking more relative placements for children in foster care
- Children do not want to be adopted so they sabotage their adoptive placement.

# Overall Summary/Discussion

## Main Points:

- Mean age of the participants was 12.53
- 23% of the sample population was 15 years old
- The second highest/oldest age in the sample was twelve years, approximately 13%.
- Black and biracial children represented 29% and 2% of the sample respectively
- 62% of the males within the sample were white; 76% of the females were white.
- Biracial males represented the lowest population within the sample, at 4%.



# Overall Summary/Discussion Cont'd

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## Implications for Policy & Practice:

- Specialized recruitment for adolescents
- All teens ages 12-18 need individualized services that teach skills in self-sufficiency
- More staff to accommodate more adolescents who are in foster care
- Adoption workers should be involved in recruitment within the child's community, church, etc.



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### Strengths/Limitations:

- Obtained information to assist in recruiting more specialized adoptive homes for children
- Due to confidentiality, records were not easily accessible
- Assumed that there were only certain barriers to adoption
- Discovered that there were other significant factors that presented barriers to adoption (i.e. – sibling groups)
- Could not access reliable data to determine if children have been adopted, AFCARS did not have comparable data to the SNAP report (two year difference in reported data; no comparable data for age and biracial children in KY)



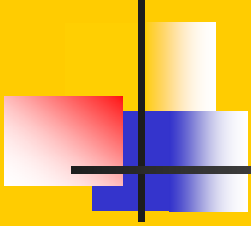
### What you would have done differently:

- NEVER, NEVER, NEVER do research in adoptions!
- Obtain a list of appropriate research topics from Cabinet IRB prior to start of research.
- Would have used personnel in lieu of accessing confidential reports to obtain more information.
- Need more opportunities to research other issues/interests outside of field practicum.



### Implications for future research:

- Understanding and knowing the process/expectations of the Cabinet IRB
- Avoid confidential reports; utilize Cabinet staff or existing data
- Do some of the significant factors influence post-adoption disruption?



Thanks for your attention